

WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

Hear again the Word of God for this twentieth Sunday after the feast of Pentecost:

Looking upon them, Jesus says, "For men there is no power, but not for God: for all powers are with God."¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

The theme verse for this week which has been taken from Jesus' words is normally translated:

With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.²

What those words do not convey is the full and deep meaning of St. Mark's original records. That is, two words, in our language, "impossible," and "possible" are used in many contexts. In some of them, the rich meaning that the Holy Spirit intends through St. Mark's inspired words is not poured into our ears, minds and hearts. That is, in this text, where Jesus is speaking of how people may be sure and certain that they have His Faith that saves from sin, death and the devil, there is to be brought forth the concepts of powerlessness and power with regard to salvation and eternal life.

What you, dear Christian, should be certain, is that in Christ's holding onto you through His Word and Sacraments, you are saved into eternity, and daily being saved, that is made holy, by the same. Jesus desires that the heavenly Father's children in the Faith hold onto the One who has given them faith. He wants them, you, to look to His Word, and not the things He gives you, allows you to have stewardship over in this

¹ Mark 10:27.

² Mark 10:27b.

life, for proofs of your present and eternal rescue from the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh. That is why you have heard in this sermon, and will continue as we go forward, Jesus' words regarding forgiveness, salvation and eternal life summed up with this translation:

Looking upon them, Jesus says, "For men there is no power, but not for God: for all powers are with God."³

Some of you have learned, and some of you will learn, to express that statement of our Lord with words like these:

I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith...⁴

The divine concepts and realities, contained, confessed and taught in the explanation of the Third Article of the Creed ring as foreign in many congregations that would be called Christian today as they would have in synagogues that would have been called orthodox – right teaching, right worshipping – two thousand years ago. That is, people who want to be seen, and believed to be, in the Church of God desire to look to themselves, and the things of the world which they have, as the authors and proofs of their faith.

How many people do you know who claim to be in the true Christian Church like to inform you of when they decided to follow Jesus? Are there people in your life

³ Mark 10:27.

⁴Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

who seem to delight in displaying their worldly gifts, treasures, retirement plans, autos, trucks, motorcycles, boats, golf cars, clubs, houses, vacation resort memberships and so forth as proofs that God has blessed them more abundantly than others? Have there been times in your life when you have looked to what you have as a measure of God's pleasure with you?

If so, repent, by hearing the Word of God which declares, "*For men there is no power, but not for God: for all powers are with God.*"⁵ Turn from the sins of self-sufficiency and "theologies of prosperity," and look to the truth of the Gospel. That is, that Jesus died to bring God's power of forgiveness to you. He alone was raised from the dead that you may be sure and certain that God is working His power that makes you right with Him, to give you an eternal home with Him, forever.

Today's theme verse was first spoken to those devout and faithful followers of Jesus who had just witnessed a rich man turn from following Christ on account of his love for his wealth, and his surety that it was a measure of God's pleasure with him. The Sunday Gospel readings must be kept in their contexts, even in our sermons. Those who were here last week should be able to remember the account of the rich man who left Jesus, because that rich man could not leave his riches to follow Jesus.

For those of us who weren't here last week, the narrative that comes before Jesus' words for today display a man who truly believed he had kept the Ten Commandments, yet could not follow Jesus. It was not on account of his following the

⁵ *Mark 10:27b.*

Law that he could not enter the true family of God. Rather, it was due to his trusting in his worldly wealth, possessions and income as being more important than the Lord's call to place one's trust fully in the Lord. That is why today's Gospel reading began with these words:

Then, looking about, Jesus says to His disciples, "How difficult (it remains for) the ones having wealth to come into the kingdom of God."⁶

The Church notes that it is not impossible for the wealthy people of the world to enter the eternal kingdom of God. Further, it is not that the rich are more powerless to receive saving Faith, or to keep it, than the poor of this world. All people are, before God, with regard to salvation, forgiveness and eternal life, the same. All are powerless to effect these divine gifts for themselves. That anyone has and maintains the salvation Christ died to bring into creation is a gift of God.

What Jesus is teaching is that God does not look upon people as people often do. That is, God is not a respecter of persons. He does not reward people with the Faith because they have been born into wealth, or have chosen a life's work that brings them worldly wealth. Further, such things as a great riches are not, in themselves, proof that one is more favored than another by the God of all creation. In other words, God does not view the full attainment of the American dream as an indication of His favor and blessing! And neither should you.

That is a difficult teaching for we who have been brought up in life with expectations of prosperity, long-life, settled and funded retirements, wealth to pass on to

our children, grandchildren and so forth. While we may have those things, they are not to be viewed or believed, by us, to be signs that we are better in God's sight, more saved if you will, than those who have less. The call of the text is to look to God who has the power to grant eternal life, forgiveness and salvation from sin, and to trust in the proclamation that He did all that was necessary for us, when He died on the cross. His resurrection from the grave is your proof that you are right with the Father, not any worldly possessions you may or may not have!

Jesus' first disciples grasped how harsh His teaching was when they thought about it with regard to what their culture held to be true regarding God's favor. For a long time, in their world, their religious leaders had taught that one's wealth was an indication of God's favor. The common person was led to believe that the wealthier one was, the more one could be sure that he or she was right with God.

You may find that teaching today in the prosperity gospel media preachers. These are the ones on TV, radio, internet, (and for those who desire to remain in the last century - print), who direct their hearers to look to God's gifts of money, power, wealth, all worldly goods, as a measure of how much God thinks of their faith. These same charlatans who preach a gospel other than that of Scripture have been reported to have informed those who have less than others that they need to have more faith to get more goods.

⁶ *Mark 10:23.*

When faced with the truth of God's Word regarding the measure of worldly wealth as to one's salvation, the reaction of those who believe in the prosperity gospel of today will be the same as those long-ago followers of Jesus, *and the disciples marveled upon His words.*⁷ Their salvation world-view was being challenged. How could it be that those who appeared devout believers, who had so much worldly treasure might have more trouble getting into God's kingdom than the meager fishermen, tax collectors and the like among them? The concept that those who had been seemingly blessed on earth would have more trouble following Christ than those who had to scrimp and save, and work so hard for their daily bread, was a teaching difficult to grasp. The next words of the text shows God's desire to meet them where their thoughts were leading them.

*But, Jesus again answering, says to them, "Oh, children, how difficult it remains to come in into the Kingdom of God! It remains easier for (a) camel to go through the opening of (a) needle than a rich man to come into the kingdom of God."*⁸

Jesus answers His disciples' lack of understanding with an example that is a clear exaggeration for effect. Despite what you may have heard over the years about the camel and the needle, the text supports the truth that the camel is a four-legged large land animal, and the needle is a small tool used for sewing cloth. It simply means that no matter how diligently one tries, one cannot get a whole camel through the eye of a small needle.

The illustration Jesus uses is to display to His hearers for all time that the temptations that come with great wealth, even to those who are "in" the Church, bring

⁷ Mark 10:24a.

temptations to trust in wealth rather than God. That is one reason why the truly evangelical preachers in your lives have worked to ever point you to God as the Author and Pioneer of the Faith. It is Christ's faith, that which enables Him to bear your sins on earth, onto the cross, and into death, His faith that alone bears you into the Kingdom of God. Only in His arms – the Word and Sacraments – are you carried through wealth and poverty, sickness and health, from life into death and into life again.

That is an amazing reality, even today. God's revealed truths carry you through times, and thoughts, and worries, about your place in His Kingdom. When you consider that God sees into heart, mind and soul, you may be tempted to ask, as did the disciples long ago: *who then, has power to be saved?*⁹ At those times, recall His Words of comfort, words of the Faith which are given to anchor you to all He does for you:

*"For men there is no power, but not for God: for all powers are with God."*¹⁰

Or, as you have confessed, or will learn to confess,

*In this Christian church he daily and abundantly forgives all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and on the last day he will raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.*¹¹

The peace which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Pentecost 20B (*Lutheran Service Book* three-year series)

Christ Lutheran Mission Church

Ecclesiastes 5:10-20; Hebrews 4:1-13; Mark 10:23-31

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Pastor Michael H. Merhouse

⁸ *Mark* 10:24b -25

⁹ *Mark* 10:26b.

¹⁰ *Mark* 10:27b.

¹¹ Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

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TRANSLATION, SECOND DRAFT:

Then, looking about, Jesus says to His disciples, "How, with difficulty, the ones the things one uses having into the kingdom of God to come in."¹²

Then, Jesus again answering, says to them, "Oh, children, how with difficulty remains into the Kingdom of God to come in. It remains easier (a) camel through (the) opening of (the) needle to go through than (a) rich man into the Kingdom of God to come in."¹³

Looking upon them, Jesus says, "For men powerless, but not with God: for all powers are with God."¹⁴

¹² *Mark* 10:23.

¹³ *Mark* 10:24b -25.

¹⁴ *Mark* 10:27.